

Third Letter to Uncle Sam

Translated from the [Urdu](#) by [Khalid Hasan](#)

Saadat Hasan Manto

31 Laxmi Mansions
Hall Road, Lahore

15 March 1954

Dear Uncle,

Greetings,

I write this after a long break. The fact is that I was ill. According to our poetic tradition, the treatment for illness lies in what is called the elixir of joy served by a slender temptress straight out of the quatrains of Omar Khayyam from a long-necked crystal jug. However, I think that is all poetry. Not to speak of comely cupbearers, one can't even find an ugly servant boy with a mustache to play the cupbearer.

Beauty has fled this land. While women have come out from behind the veil, one look at them and you wish they had stayed behind it. Your Max Factor has made them even uglier. You send free wheat, free literature, free arms. Why not send a couple of hundred examples of pure American womanhood here so that they could at least serve a drink as it is supposed to be served?

I fell ill because of this blasted liquor--God damn it--which is poison, pure and simple. And raw. Not that I did not know, not that I did not understand, but what the poet Meer wrote applies to my condition.

What a simpleton Meer is!

*The apothecary's boy who made him fall ill
Is the very one he goes to get his medicine*

Who knows what Meer found in that apothecary's boy from whom he sought his medicine when he knew he was ill because of him. The man from whom I buy my poison is far more ill than I am. While I have survived because I am used to a hard life, I see little hope for him.

In the three months I was in a hospital's general ward, no American aid reached me. I think you knew nothing about my illness otherwise you would have surely sent me two or three packages of Terramycin and earned credit in this world and the next.

Our foreign publicity leaves a great deal to be desired and our government, in any case, has no interest in writers, poets and painters.

Our late lamented government, I recall, appointed Firdausi-i-Islam Hafiz Jullandhri director of the song publicity department at a monthly salary of Rs 1,000.¹ After the establishment of Pakistan, all that was allotted to him was a house and a printing press. Today you pick up the papers and what do you see? Hafiz Jullandhri bewailing his lot, having been thrown out of the committee appointed to compose a national anthem for Pakistan. He is one poet in the country who can write an anthem for this, the world's largest Islamic state, and even set it to music. He has divorced his British wife because the British are gone. He is said to be now looking for an American wife. Uncle, for God's sake help him there so that he can be saved from a sorry end.

The number of your nephews runs into millions but a nephew like yours truly you will not find even if you lit an atom bomb to look for him. Do pay me some attention therefore. All I need is an announcement from you that your country (which may it please God to protect till the end of time) will only help my country (may God blight the distilleries of this land) acquire arms if Saadat Hasan Manto is sent over to you.

Overnight, my value will go up and after this announcement, I will stop doing *Shama* and *Director* crossword puzzles.² Important people will come to visit my home and I will ask you to airmail me a typical American grin which I will glue to my face so that I can receive them properly.

Such a grin can have a thousand meanings. For instance, "You are an ass." "You are exceptionally brilliant." "I derived nothing but mental discomfort from this meeting." "You are a casual-wear shirt made in America." "You are a box of matches made in Pakistan." "You are a homemade herbal tonic." "You are Coca-Cola." etc. etc.

I want to live in Pakistan because I love this bit of earth, dust from which, incidentally, has lodged itself permanently in my lungs. However, I will certainly visit your country so that I can get my health back. Barring my lungs, every other organ in my body I will hand over to your experts and ask them to turn them American.

I like the American way of life. I also like the design of your casual-wear shirt. It is both a good design and a good billboard. You can print the latest propaganda item on it every day and move from Shezan to Coffee House to Chinese Lunch Home so that everyone can read it.³

I also want a Packard so that when I go riding in it on the Mall, wearing that shirt with a pipe gifted by you resting between my teeth, all the progressive and nonprogressive writers of Lahore should come to realize that they have been wasting their time so far.

But look, Uncle, you will have to buy petrol for the car, though I promise to write a story as soon as I have the Packard that I would call "Iran's Nine Maunds of Oil and Radha." Believe me, the moment the story is printed, all this trouble about Iranian oil will end and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan,⁴ who is still alive, will have to amend that couplet he once wrote about Lloyd George and oil.

Another thing I would want from you would be a tiny, teeny weeny atom bomb because for long I have wished to perform a certain good deed. You will naturally want to know what.

You have done many good deeds yourself and continue to do them. You decimated Hiroshima, you turned Nagasaki into smoke and dust and you caused several thousand children to be born in Japan. Each to his own. All I want you to do is to dispatch me some dry cleaners. It is like this. Out there, many Mullah types after urinating pick up a stone and with one hand inside their untied shalwar, use the stone to absorb the after-drops of urine as they resume their walk. This they do in full public view. All I want is that the moment such a person appears, I should be able to pull out that atom bomb you will send me and lob it at the Mullah so that he turns into smoke along with the stone he was holding.

As for your military pact with us, it is remarkable and should be maintained. You should sign something similar with India. Sell all your old condemned arms to the two of us, the ones you used in the last war. This junk will thus be off your hands and your armament factories will no longer remain idle.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is a Kashmiri, so you should send him a gun which should go off when it is placed in the sun. I am a Kashmiri too, but a Muslim which is why I have asked for a tiny atom bomb for myself.

One more thing. We can't seem able to draft a constitution. Do kindly ship us some experts because while a nation can manage without a national anthem, it cannot do without a constitution, unless such is your wish.

One more thing. As soon as you get this letter, send me a shipload of American matchsticks. The matchsticks manufactured here have to be lit with the help of Iranian-made matchsticks. And after you have used half the box, the rest are unusable unless you take help from matches made in Russia which behave more like firecrackers than matches.

The American topcoats are also excellent and without them our Landa Bazar⁵ would be quite barren. But why don't you send us trousers as well? Don't you ever take off your trousers? If you do, you probably ship them to India. There has to be a strategy to it because you send us jackets but no trousers which you send to India. When there is a war, it will be your jackets and your trousers. These two will fight each other using arms supplied by you.

And what is this I hear about Charlie Chaplin having given up his U.S. citizenship? What did this joker think he was doing? He surely is suffering from communism; otherwise why would a man who has lived all his life in your country, made his name there, made his money there, do what he has done? Does he not remember the time when he used to beg in the streets of London and nobody took any notice of him!

Why did he not go to Russia? But then there is no shortage of jokers there. Perhaps he should go to England so that its residents learn to laugh heartily like Americans. As it is, they always look so somber and superior? It is time some of their pretense came off.

I now close my letter with a freestyle kiss to Hedy Lamarr.

Your nephew,

Saadat Hasan Manto

¹ Hafiz Jullandhri was one of Urdu's leading poets before independence and gained popularity for his poetic epic based on the history of Islam, "Shahnameh-e-Islam." He was likened to the great medieval Persian poet Firdausi who wrote the famous epic poem "Shahnameh." Hafiz was often called Firdausi-e-Islam. After independence he was assigned to write the Pakistani national anthem. However, he always felt that his services had not been recognized to the extent they deserved. Manto did not think much of him, either as a poet or a man.

² *Shama*, Delhi, and *Director*, Lahore, were two popular magazines of the time that ran crossword puzzle competitions that offered generous cash prizes.

³ Zelin's Coffee House, Pak Tea House, and Cheney's Lunch Home, all located on the Mall, were Lahore's most popular restaurants at the time where writers and intellectuals gathered. Only Pak Tea House has survived, though it is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

⁴ Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, prolific poet, writer, and journalist who founded the Urdu daily *Zamindar* from Lahore. He died in the early 1950s.

⁵ Landa Bazar, Lahore's famous secondhand clothes market.

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